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Mail From U.S. Intercepted, China Says

Peking Blames Taiwan Agents in Hong Kong Post Office

From the Chicago Daily News

PEKING—Air and sea mail from the United States to Communist China has been illegally intercepted and opened. At least one U.S. senator and other prominent Americans have had their Peking-bound letters tampered with, Chinese officials charge.

The Chinese officials, who disclosed this information recently to the Chicago Daily News, believe that mail from the United States, addressed to various Chinese ministries and organizations, is being intercepted in the British colony of Hong Kong. "By Nationalist Chinese agents working in the Hong Kong post office, out to embarrass the People's Republic of China."

According to these officials, one such piece of mail that was tampered with, was a letter from Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey (D-Minn.), to Peking's China Travel Service, requesting a visa.

In Washington, a spokesman for Humphrey confirmed the incident. "The senator received a reply, but it wasn't from the People's Republic of China," the aide said. According to the aide, the reply was "a manifest fake. It contained vicious propaganda denouncing the senator as an 'imperialist' and a 'capitalist.' The reply was an obvious fake, written on a blue aerogram. The letterhead, 'China Travel Service,' had been typed in," the aide said.

Humphrey's office notified the State Department of the incident, but according to the Minnesota Democrat's spokesman, never received a reply. A State Department source reluctantly confirmed the story. But a spokesman for the U.S. Postal Service in Washington said they had never been informed by anyone of U.S. mail to China being tampered with. Under an international postal agreement, it is illegal to tamper with any overseas mail, postal authorities said.

Chinese officials say that there have been "at least a dozen cases" of mail from the United States to China, as well as mail from China to the United States having been opened. In some cases, according to the Chinese, mail to Peking is opened, its original contents removed and replaced with propaganda denouncing the Peking regime. Mail from Peking, as in the case of the bogus letter to Humphrey, is also opened and either stuffed with anti-American propaganda or false replies to the sender.

Some of these hoax replies also bear the letterheads of

the China Medical Assn. as well as the China Travel Service, according to Chinese officials. The spurious letters have been sent to U.S. businessmen, academics, scientists and members of the medical profession, the Chinese said.

A spokesman for the U.S. Postal Service admits it is possible that "some mail" could be tampered with in Hong Kong. According to an agreement between Peking and the Hong Kong government, the British colony is the chief transfer agent for all mail between China and the United States. "The U.S. has no alternative but to comply with this agreement," he said.

Chinese officials, however, said that with the conclusion of a recent airline agreement between China and Japan, they are shipping airmail via Japan to the United States.

Another problem concerning mail to China, according to U.S. postal officials, is that some mail is inadvertently sent to the Nationalist-held island of Taiwan. "because some people simply address their mail to China, and some of our postal employees are still not aware that there are two Chinas." Mail to Communist China should be addressed "People's Republic of China," while mail to Taiwan should be written as the "Republic of China," he said.

A post office source, who asked not to be identified, said the mail theft situation overseas, especially in the Far East, "is serious." As one example, he cited a recent theft of more than a million dollars in American Express travelers checks at London's Heathrow Airport. "Four days later, the checks turned up being cashed in Las Vegas, Nevada," he said.

No Chinese officials or U.S. postal authorities would comment on recent disclosures that some mail to Communist China from this country was being opened in San Francisco by the Central Intelligence Agency.